



TITLE:

<研究論文(原著論文)>Picturing and Meta-Linguistic Expressivism

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CITATION:

Mitani, Naozumi. <研究論文(原著論文)>Picturing and Meta-Linguistic Expressivism. Contemporary and Applied Philosophy 2016, 8(2): 50-69

ISSUE DATE:

2016-09-01

URL:

<https://doi.org/10.14989/226253>

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Picturing and Meta-Linguistic Expressivism^{*}

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Abstract

In this article, I will excavate the rich philosophical resource that Wilfrid Sellars left us and explicate in which sense it still merits our attention. Firstly, I will focus on Ruth Millikan's interpretation of Sellars's idea of picturing and give it a detailed examination. Secondly, I will argue that Millikan's reading of Sellars diverges from Sellars's original position at one crucial point, which led her argument to show its soft underbelly. Thirdly, I will make explicit in which sense the original version of Sellars merits our close attention, under the rubric of "picturing" and "global expressivism".

Keywords: Sellars, Millikan, picturing, global expressivism, evolutionary theory of language

1 Introduction

My aim in this article is to excavate the rich philosophical resource Wilfrid Sellars left us and explicate in which sense it still merits our attention. To be more specific, my argument will proceed in the following order.

- 1) I will focus on Sellars's notion of "picturing" and use it as a steppingstone for my argument.
- 2) I will take up Ruth Millikan's interpretation of Sellarsian picturing and give it a detailed examination.
- 3) Millikan's approach to Sellars is a noteworthy one on two regards: a) It is one of the rare cases that focuses on the topic of Sellarsian picturing and succeeds in deriving fruitful outcomes from it; indeed, picturing is rather an unfamiliar topic even among the enthusiastic readers of Sellars and has seldom been paid due attention. b) It is also a rare example that bridges the chasm or divide between the philosophical successors of Sellars, customarily registered as the divide between right-wing and left-wing Sellarsians.

^{*} *CAP* Vol.8. n.2 (2016) pp. 36-55. 受理日: 2015.02.28 採用日: 2016.03.15 採用カテゴリ: 研究論文 掲載日: 2016.09.01.

4) However, Millikan's reading of Sellars diverges from Sellars's original position at one crucial point. As I will show, Millikan's biological, "global descriptivist" approach to picturing is nailed down to a peculiar dictum of anti-Sellarsian Sellarsianism.

5) I will explicate how Millikan's digression from Sellars constitutes her soft underbelly and make explicit how the original version of Sellars merits our close attention, under the rubric of "picturing" and "global expressivism".

2 The background

2.1 The philosophical legacy of Wilfrid Sellars

Robert Brandom, in his recently published book on Sellars, wrote this:

Wilfrid Stalker Sellars (1912-1989) was the greatest American philosopher of the middle years of the twentieth century. The depth, originality, and range of his philosophical thought earn him a place alongside Charles Sanders Peirce, the greatest American philosopher of an earlier generation. [...] one can gauge the importance of a philosopher by the wealth of ideas, connections, and projects he bequeaths, by their power and fecundity, their capacity for further development, their potential for further illumination ^{*1}.

Testimonials that support Brandom's remark can easily be gained.

First, as the proof of fecundity or "the wealth of ideas he bequeaths" we can adduce the wide-ranging, systematic character of Sellars's philosophy. Reflecting his now well known meta philosophical motto--"The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term ^{*2}"--the philosophy of Sellars covers almost all areas of philosophy. For example, glancing through the pages of Willem deVries's masterful book on Sellars ^{*3}, one can notice that the contents of the book include philosophy of language, ontology, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and practical philosophy ^{*4}.

Second, to bolster the plausibility of the insistence that Sellars's philosophy is bountifully furnished with the "capacity for further development" and the "potential for further illumination", we can appeal to the fact that the virtue of its wide-rangingness gave rise to many philosophical heirs. To name just a few

^{*1} Brandom (2015): p. 1.

^{*2} Sellars (1962/PSIM): in SPR p. 1; in ISR p. 369.

^{*3} cf. deVries (2005).

^{*4} We also have to note that close attention to the history of philosophy comprises one of the most conspicuous features of Sellars's philosophy.

eminent examples, we can spot the philosophies of Richard Rorty, Robert Brandom himself, and John McDowell in the wake of Sellars's attack on the myth of the given. As philosophical successors of Sellars's naturalistic approach to intentionality, we can refer to Ruth Millikan and Daniel Dennett. Likewise, we can detect the profound influence of Sellars in Bas Van Fraassen's argument against scientific realism. And last but not least, we could mention Sellars's 'theory-theory' about mind as a precursor of the eliminative materialism espoused by Paul and Patricia Churchland.

Of course those philosophical scions oftentimes digress from the orthodox Sellarsian dictum and show their tendency to get un-Sellarsian but that should not discount the importance of Sellars's influence^{*5}.

2.2 The divide

However, as can be expected from the list of diverse names mentioned above, the fecundity and the wide-rangingness of Sellars's philosophy is itself a source of immanent difficulty. That is, its richness as a merit was at one time a demerit that unfortunately but inevitably led the heirs to split into two camps.

As one of the core problems that are located at the center of Sellars's philosophy, there's this one: How are we to make of the relation between the causal or real order of things that are located in the non-normative domain and the conceptual or rational order that composes the normative domain? And as a glance at the literature tells, it is concerning this crucial problem that the Sellarsians are divided into the two opposing camps that Brandom, echoing Rorty, calls "the now traditional division of Sellarsians into a right and left wing"^{*6}.

Roughly, the so-called right-winged Sellarsians hold it that Sellars's dictum of *scientia mensura*—"in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not"^{*7}—should be taken as the core tenet of Sellarsian enterprise. Thus, they insist that this tenet of Sellars gives us enough reason to think that the normative components of our intentional activities are reducible to the non-normative causal order of the world.

In contrast, those who are placed on left side of the divide regard Sellars's attack on the myth of the given and the conception of functional role semantics as the most important aspect of Sellars, thus emphasize the radically irreducible character of the normative.

Generally, Dennett, Jay Rosenberg, and the Churchlands are (among others) included in the right-wing school, whereas Rorty, Brandom, and McDowell are regarded as the representative figures from the leftist group.

^{*5} cf. Lance (2008).

^{*6} Brandom (2005): p. 229.

^{*7} Sellars (1956): p. 173.

2.3 Ruth Millikan as an irenic heir of Sellars

As I alluded at the outset, what gets our eyes at this point is the philosophy of Ruth Millikan and how she inherits Sellars's philosophy. As we'll see below, Millikan's theory about Sellars's (rather Wittgensteinian) idea of "picturing" can be construed to bridge and reconcile the chasm between the two opposing parties.

Millikan, who openly calls herself a "daughter" of the Sellars family, frequently and recurrently made reference to Sellars. Of these, particularly important for the aim of this paper is a piece named 'The Father, the son, and the daughter'^{*8}. In that, Millikan squarely deals with her philosophical relationship with Sellars and tries to specify how her understanding about the proper function of language is related to Sellars's idea of picturing^{*9}.

Millikan begins her paper by alluding to a "crack" that might be found in Sellars's own position. And echoing the left-right divide mentioned above, Millikan considers the possibility that the dual influences from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations* might have created a fault line that runs through the philosophy of Sellars. The existence of this fault line, she goes on to say, might have caused the large differences among the scions like Brandom and herself.

I have pursued the picturing themes from the *Tractatus* that were carried through in Sellars' discussions of that causal-order relation between language and the world that he called "representing" ... Brandom has followed Sellars' interest in the language games metaphor from *Philosophical Investigations*, expressed in Sellars as a form of inferential role semantics and in the thesis that one learns to think only as one learns to abide by the rules of a language^{*10}.

However, Millikan rejects this possibility on the spot, saying

... But on inspection there is, at least, no obvious crack in the bridge Sellars built between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. [...] Indeed, Sellars went to great pains to explain exactly how inferential role semantics was consistent with 'Tractarian' picturing^{*11}.

That said, our task is to make clear how Millikan cashes out this casually commented line of thought and manages to bridge the gap.

^{*8} Millikan (2005). Of course, the "father" in the title is Sellars himself, and the "son" refers to Bob Brandom.

^{*9} N.B. My illustration of Millikan below partly overlaps with what I wrote and published elsewhere. cf. Mitani (2015).

^{*10} Millikan (2005): p. 59f.

^{*11} Millikan (2005): p. 60.

3 Millikan's reconstruction of Sellarsian picturing

3.1 Picturing and its survival value

To repeat, Millikan's task is to illustrate how the idea of *Tractarian* picturing can be consistent with the language game metaphor initiated by the *Investigations*. Millikan's exposition proceeds in the following way.

The first step Millikan takes is giving heed to Sellars's idea about languagings as pattern governed behavior. The "pattern governed behavior" is the notion of "propensity to exhibit a certain sort of behavioral uniformities" (such as the disposition to utter "lion!" when encountering one), and as such it is distinguished from mere regularities found in purely causal phenomena, e.g. the lawful sequence of lightening-thunder. As is visible from our language acquisition process, the distinctive uniformity exhibited by the pattern-governed behavior consists in its being achieved by the so-called "S-R reinforcement"--i.e. the operant conditioning that is effected between stimulus-response sequences--in linguistic community, rather than its merely occurring in accordance with the laws of nature.

However, being merely pattern-governed falls short as an explanation of our linguistic activity in the full fledged sense, i.e. what Sellars calls languagings as "rule governed behavior." For, behaviors that are merely pattern-governed can be performed by, say, a parrot that has been trained to utter "red" when presented with red objects^{*12}.

As a *bona fide* Sellarsian, Millikan rejects Quinian behavioristic reductionism about language and espouses that language should somehow be "disposition transcendent," i.e., it should be beyond mere parrot-like patterns in some respect. At this point, Millikan urges us to consult one remarkable text from Sellars.

The key to the concept of a linguistic rule is its complex relation to pattern governed linguistic behavior. The general concept of pattern governed behavior is a familiar one. Roughly it is the concept of behavior which exhibits a pattern, not because it is brought about by the intention that it exhibit this pattern, but because the propensity to emit behavior of the pattern has been selectively reinforced, and the propensity to emit behavior which does not conform to this pattern selectively extinguished. A useful analogy is the natural selection which results in the patterns of behavior which constitutes the so-called language of bees^{*13}.

In the former half of the citation, the characterization given to pattern governed behavior is reiterated in

^{*12} The case of a parrot is Brandom's cherished example. cf. Brandom (2015): pp. 100-105.

^{*13} Sellars (1974/MFC): in ISR p. 86f.

Sellars's own voice. Then, what we have to take notice is in the latter half, where Sellars mentions "the natural selection which results in the patterns of behavior which constitutes the so-called language of bees" as "a useful analogy." To illuminate what Millikan draws out of this "useful analogy", the following text from Sellars is helpful.

...When you describe the process whereby we come to adopt the language of which [some inferential] move is a part, you give an *anthropological*, a (very schematic) *causal* account of how language came to be used....in which you stress evolutionary analogies and cite the language of the beehive ^{*14}.

In the case of bees,

(a) The pattern (dance) is first exemplified by particular bees in a way which is *not* appropriately described by saying that the successive acts by which the pattern is realized occur *because of the pattern*. (b) Having a 'wiring diagram' which expresses itself in this pattern has survival value. (c) Through the mechanisms of heredity and natural selection it comes about that all bees have this 'wiring diagram',^{*15}.

Of the "anthropological" viewpoint mentioned here, what counts is the idea that we can *describe* the use of semantic language without using it. To be more specific, Millikan's anthropological account aims at reporting "what patterns of response in a language community, along with the origins of these responses in a history of language training, and training of the language trainers, and so forth, constitutes that 'rot' means *red* in that community ^{*16}".

To our current concern, what is of interest is how Sellars's emphasis on the evolutionary analogy and citation of the language of the beehive is connected to Millikan's anthropological account. Intuitively, the idea is to elucidate (i.e. give anthropological explanation about) the process by which our language use came to obtain the survival value that it does. And it is at this point that Millikan inherits our target notion of picturing. As she says,

...our mental states embody a *picture* or *map* of our environment that enables us appropriately to maneuver within and modulate our behavior in response to that environment. ...I adopt [Sellars's] suggestion that this picturing or mapping may have immediate practical uses, as when one bee makes

^{*14} Sellars (1963): p. 353; cited in Millikan (2005): p. 64.

^{*15} Sellars (1963): p. 326; cited in Millikan (2005): p. 64.

^{*16} Millikan (2005): p. 62.

a dance-map that guides another towards nectar^{*17}.

In Sellars's own words, the idea was:

... the manner in which the names occur in the picture is a projection, in accordance with a fantastically complex system of rules of projection, of the manner in which the objects occur in the world^{*18}.

It should be easy to understand, in the case of the bees, how 'mapping' or 'picturing' use of language gets the survival value that it does. The survival value accruing to the language of the beehive came from its functioning as the maps or pictures of the location of nectar via certain rules of projection. What must not be missed about this is how Millikan makes clear the implication of the story of the bees and constitutes an anthropological/evolutionary account concerning "our" language use. And this is what Millikan says about this:

Think of a case in which a person is able to map or locate the presence of a predator in different ways, from different perspectives, under changing conditions, using different sensory modalities, employing different inferential patterns. For example, by seeing him in the flesh, 20 meters ahead, by hearing his roar behind the bush, or by inferring his presence from his footprints, and so on. It should be obvious that this task of re-identification (with evolutionary utility) becomes much easier and more efficient if the agent can use some linguistic media or corresponding empirical concepts for that purpose^{*19}.

3.2 Millikan as an irenic heir of Sellars (recap)

Now what Millikan aims at should be clear.

1) Millikan adopts Sellars's notion of "pattern governed behavior" as a starting point for her own exposition of language.

2) Millikan agrees with Sellars that our linguistic practice should be disposition transcendent (i.e., must exceed the merely pattern-governed sort of behavior) in some sense and regards herself as a typical Sellarsian on this count.

3) To explicate how this is so, Millikan adopts anthropological approach (again a Sellarsian idea).

4) According to Millikan's anthropological approach, rule-governedness or disposition transcendent character of our linguistic activity gets clarified in accordance with the "survival value" that accrues to our linguistic practice.

^{*17} Millikan (2005): p. 67.

^{*18} Sellars (1963/SPR): p. 215.

^{*19} cf. Millikan (1984): ch. 18-19; Millikan (2012). P. 12f.

5) The suggestion is that language is disposition transcendent in that following the rules of language “has a broader benefit or utility for the kids or community as a whole.”

6) In explaining this disposition transcendent utility of our language use, Millikan appeals to mapping or picturing function of language that can serve as a medium of identification and re-identification of the selfsame object.

7) Millikan deploys two Sellarsian ideas, that of “evolutionary anthropology” and that of a proper function of language as ‘mapping’ or ‘picturing.’ (Millikan suggests that Sellars’s idiom of survival value is roughly equivalent to her original conception of “proper function.”)

8) In sum, the core Sellarsian feature that Millikan inherits from Sellars can be found in its broadly evolutionary character; that is, its being an attempt to give clear explication of the unique, rule-governed character of our language in terms of the survival value deriving from the picturing/mapping use.

9) From above, one important consequence can be drawn: Millikan’s reconstruction of Sellarsian picturing escapes the left-right divide introduced in Section 2. For, by emphasizing the disposition transcendent or rule-governed character of our linguistic activities, Millikan’s theory makes visible how the theory of *Tractarian* picturing is connected to the rule-governed character of our linguistic activity.

10) As Brandom says, “[t]he sophisticated, broadly evolutionary story that Millikan tells to elaborate this thought integrates and illuminates the relations between the natural and the normative dimensions of intentionality (roughly, those that impressed the right- and the left-wing Sellarsians, respectively) *far* better than that of Sellars himself—for whom the naturalistic dimension of picturing and the normative dimension of sematic assertibility remained in largely unresolved tension”^{*20}.

4 The prodigal daughter’s departure from the father

4.1 Brief Comments on Millikan’s reading of Sellars

At this point, several comments have to be added to Millikan’s reconstruction of Sellarsian picturing as rule-governed linguistic behavior.

i) As I suggested at the Introduction, Millikan’s work is one of the few attempts that focused on Sellars’s idea of picturing and succeeded in drawing fruitful outcomes from it.

ii) Indeed, as some of the literature have reported, picturing was a topic which, despite consistent adherence on Sellars’s part, has been largely ignored even by the sympathetic readers of Sellars.

iii) For example, while Sellars himself featured the theme of picturing as the kernel of his systematic thought, calling it “the heart of the enterprise” that made “a decisive step to the series of attempts I have

^{*20} Brandom (2005): p. 230.

made over the past ten years^{*21},” even the enthusiastic followers of Sellars, like Johanna Seibt, had to report that “surprisingly ...the notion of picturing has received comparatively little constructive attention^{*22}.”

iv) However, as we’ll see, Millikan’s evolutionary theory of language departs from Sellars’s original position, and examining in which way it is so deserves our consideration.

v) To be more specific, Millikan’s tenet can be characterized as “global descriptivism”, whereas Sellars’s philosophy of language explicitly rejects the global descriptivism about our linguistic use.

vi) Sellars’s rejection concerns one of the most essential features of his philosophy, i.e. his Kantian orientation.

vii) As will be shown below, Millikan’s global descriptivism about language, with her strong penchant for biological naturalism, invokes grave difficulty, while avoidance of the same sort of difficulty constitutes Sellars’s original motivation toward anti-global descriptivism.

4.2 Millikan’s global descriptivism

As is outlined above, Millikan’s anthropological-historical (“biological” she prefers to say) account of language insists that the proper function of language is found in its being maps or pictures of our environment; that is, its being representation or description of the worldly state of affairs. In Millikan’s words,

The idea was, roughly, that in an individual’s or a community’s following the rules of a language ...a very abstract map of the world was in the process of construction^{*23}.

The crux of the matter concerns how Millikan understands the linguistic rules mentioned here. For her way of conceiving the linguistic proper functions seems to have a strong connotation about the content of the linguistic rules. To illuminate, let us rehearse how the evolutionary utility is gained from the re-identification mechanism made possible through the mapping function of language. As Millikan says,

Having an empirical concept and understanding what one is thinking of involves only the ability to recognize “that again; oh, that once more; hey, the same thing again,” nothing fuller^{*24}.

Clearly visible in this passage is Millikan’s assertion that survival value comes from *correct descriptive use* of language. As long as our linguistic representation’s being correct picture of the world is what we get

^{*21} Sellars (1967/SM): vii

^{*22} Seibt (2009): p. 248f.; Cf. deVries (2010): p. 396; Rosenberg (2007): p. 105f.

^{*23} Millikan (2005): p. 60.

^{*24} Millikan (2013): p. 277.

survival value from, it is a matter of evidence that being correct description of the world is what counts in Millikan's biological theory. (Imagine the survival non-value that accompanies a language that misleads its users to take predators for something non-harmful.)

From above we seem to have no choice but to admit that it is correctness of language as a map that constitutes the measure or the norm against which our linguistic uses are evaluated. It is uses that produce useful outcomes that are called 'normative' qua 'standard' or 'normal' use of language," and related to this Millikan gives us the following remark: "I adopt Sellars' suggestion that adequate intentional representing is a kind of picturing or mapping^{*25}".

What is of interest about this passage is that Millikan, in the voice of a Sellarsian, seems to endorse the inference from "S is an adequate intentional representation" to "S is a map or picture of our environment." That is, Millikan seems to be committed to the view that all that there is to our language use is to be a map of the world. Judging from what has been said so far, this is understandable. For it is again a matter of evidence that descriptions that consist of the language-world correspondence of a correct sort can fulfill all the tasks that are required.

To wrap up, Millikan's thought amounts to this decisive phrase: "The basic rules of language are mapping rules only^{*26}." Otherwise put, in Millikan's view, our language uses are, even when they are conforming to rules--not "fraught with ought," and the entire story about language can consist of "descriptions all the way up." In a word, Millikan's sophisticated account about our linguistic practice can be condensed to the encapsulating slogan of "global descriptivism."

4.3 Measuring the distance between Millikan and Sellars

However, when considered vis-à-vis the original text of Sellars, Millikan's reading that boils down to the tenet of global descriptivism should give us a pause and some sort of suspicious feeling. It might be true that Millikan took her main inspiration from Sellars but her exegesis is not true to core Sellarsian thesis. Indeed, as is shown below, their bifurcation is non-trivial and turns out to reveal some important lessons.

In point of fact, we can start by citing one passage from Sellars that evidences a decisive discrepancy. In his 1957 article, 'Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities,' Sellars explicitly rejects the thesis of global descriptivism.

We have learned the core truth of "emotivism" is not only compatible with, but absurd without, *ungrudging* recognition of the fact, so properly stressed (if mis-assimilated to the model of describing) by "ethical rationalists," that ethical discourse as *ethical discourse* is a mode of rational discourse. It is my purpose to argue that the core truth of Hume's philosophy of causation is not only compatible with,

^{*25} Millikan (2005): p. 67.

^{*26} Millikan (2013): p. 278.

but absurd without, *ungrudging* recognition of those features of causal discourse as a mode of rational discourse on which the metaphysical rationalists laid such stress but also mis-assimilated to describing^{*27}.

What gets our eyes is the emphatic recommendation to take the view that moral and modal discourse are, though functioning in a non-descriptive way, rational, first class discourse as they stand. However, as Sellars urges us to approve, this is something one should find difficult to accomplish if she holds on to the traditional “tendency to assimilate all discourse to describing”--i.e. the thesis of global descriptivism. Details are to be seen shortly, but one thing is evident enough: Sellars is explicitly adopting anti-global-descriptivism.

So, the proposal is that we admit that all that passes as genuine discourse is not description (i.e. there are sentences that do not represent but still hold as rational) and grant moral/modal statements their due status as first-class citizens in the world of language. However, this is something Millikan’s global descriptivism cannot accommodate, and consideration about this point should make us detect a sort of deficiency or soft underbelly on Millikan’s part. Also, what is of importance, this overlaps the important lesson that Sellars’s anti-global-descriptivism advises us to care. Below, let us take up the case of modal statements and proceed to illuminate how this is so.

4.4 The anti-global-descriptivism espoused by Sellars

Traditionally there have been two ways of explaining modal statements^{*28}. On the one hand, the empiricist camp took it that apparently causal statements are in effect mere generalizations of regularly observed phenomena. For example, when we say “Water causes sugar to dissolve”, we are merely reporting that certain sort of events A have regularly been followed by certain type of events B. In this sense, what we do when we use causation statements is just to describe--i.e., make observation reports about--the regularity or contiguity found in nature.

However, Sellars is dissatisfied with this empiricist strand. For, as he says, our ordinary usage containing modal vocabulary evidently holds much more conceptual content than the description of mere regularity allows. For example, “lawlike statements” about causal phenomena should include subjunctives or counterfactual conditionals. Thus the empiricists are judged to fail in capturing the true grammar of causal statements and offering us the adequate language of laws, and their failure is located in the tendency to take modal statements as observational description of regularity found in nature.

On the other hand, according to the rationalist camp, causation is analyzed as physical entailment relation between natural events. As they insist, when something is caused by something else, there should

^{*27} Sellars (1957/CDCM): p. 285.

^{*28} My exposition below relies on deVries (2005) and deVries (2010).

be some objective, mind-independent structure of the world that necessarily realizes the sequence. In this sense, lawful, objective reality that is found “out there” makes the modal statements true or false and modal statements about causes and laws are taken to depict these objective necessary connections operating in the physical world.

However, as is easily expected, it is plausible enough that this way of thinking would lead us into metaphysical extravagance. For, we will not be able to find proper places for moral or modal facts in the world unless we follow the way of rationalists growing “Platonic beard.” And as a dyed in the wool naturalist, Sellars cannot be committed to view that “necessity is out there in the world, waiting for us to discover and describe.” Granting that rationalistic credo about the lawfulness of nature fares better in that they grasp the rich and powerful grammar of causal vocabularies, Sellars has to take some distance from their metaphysical claims about “a vast inflation of the furniture of the world,”^{*29} the necessity of which I see no reason for Millikan to deny. And here again, the root of the difficulty is located in the tendency to assimilate modal statements to descriptions of objective world.

5 Sellars’ s original view about our linguistic activities

5.1 Modality as inferability

But then, what is the alternative? That is, how can we construct a theory that can accommodate the validity of modal statements while avoiding the difficulties that emanate from the adoption of global descriptivism?

At the first approximation, the strategy Sellars adopts is to opt for the centrist way that runs between empiricist’s overly deflated view of causation and rationalist’s ontologically excessive supposition about necessity. And as is suggested, the idea behind Sellars’s taking the middle way consists in denying the presupposition shared by the two traditional poles, that modal statements do the job of representing or describing the worldly state of affairs. But then, if they do not represent, what do the modal statements do? Here’s what he says:

To make first hand use of [modal] expressions is to be about the business of *explaining* a state of affairs, *or justifying* an assertion. Thus, even if to state that p entails q is, in a legitimate sense, to state that something is the case, the primary use of ‘p entails q’ is not to state that something is the case, but to explain *why q*, or justify the assertion *that q* ^{*30}.

The crux of the matter is the consideration that modal vocabularies do the prescriptive/normative jobs

^{*29} deVries (2005): p. 89.

^{*30} Sellars (1957/CDCM): p. 283.

rather than descriptive/representational jobs. To repeat, Sellars's diagnosis is that the traditional rationalists and empiricists were both wrong in that they misconstrued the prescriptive character of causal and lawlike statements as descriptive. Alternatively, the "root idea" behind Sellarsian theory of modal sentences can be located in the insistence that the prescriptive or normative character of modal statements is to be specified as "*inferability*,"^{*31}. As Sellars says,

To say that it is a law of nature that all A is B is, in effect, to say that we may infer 'X is B' from 'X is A' (a materially valid inference which is not to be confused with the formally valid inference from 'All A is B *and* x is A' to 'X is B')"^{*32}

Put differently, in Sellars's view, the prescriptive/normative character of lawlike statements can get clarified when we stipulate their function as "inference tickets." Taking the case of logical necessity as an uncontroversial illustration, a modal sentence "9 is necessarily larger than 7" functions as an authorization for inferential moves from "x is 9" to "x is larger than 7." To give one instance of causal modality, it will be this: "'Smoke is caused by fire' functions as an inferential authorization for the move from 'Smoke here' to 'Fire nearby.'"

5.2 Sellars and expressivism

Given the explication above, there's one thing that we can point out: Sellars is adopting a position that today would be called "expressivism about non-descriptive vocabularies." For the defining feature of contemporary (mainly meta-ethical) expressivism, the familiar examples of which are Simon Blackburn's quasi realism and Allan Gibbard's norm expressivism, can be specified as the thesis, that linguistic proper functions are not confined to representing or describing. That is, to use Brandom's pertinent phrase, "there are other legitimate things one can do with language, other expressive functions besides representing or describing that it can perform"^{*33}.

In Sellars's own voice, though "expressivism" was not one of his words when he wrote this, the gist of the matter is formulated in this way:

[O]nce the tautology 'The world is described by descriptive concepts' is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not

^{*31} Sellars (1957/CDCM): p. 251.

^{*32} Sellars (1954/SRLG): in ISR p. 38.

^{*33} Brandom (2011): p. 195.

inferior, just different^{*34}.

Also, as a grounding for this expressivist reading of Sellars, we can appeal to the following line of thought: to recapitulate, Sellars's construal of modal statements as "inference tickets" indicates that the lawlike statements do not appear in the first-order "object language" that describes or represents the worldly state of affairs. Rather, they are functioning in the meta-linguistic stratum and express our normative recognition that the inferences occurring in the object language are valid ones (that is, the inference components *used* in the object language are just *mentioned* in the meta-linguistic modal sentences.)

That said, our earlier characterization of Sellars's theory of modality can now be given one further explication. For, as the lawlike statements located in the meta-linguistic stratum are attributed the role of expressing the attitudes of commendation or inferential commitment on the part of the speakers, rather than that of describing or representing how the world is, we could conclude that Sellars's exposition of modality can be named as meta-linguistic expressivism, in that our discursive commitments implicit in the object language are made explicit as the "inference licenses" in the meta-linguistic expression. Again, to borrow Brandom's pertinent remark on "Sellars's expressive rationality",

The general idea is that the paradigmatically rational process that Sellars invokes under the heading of "Socratic method" depends upon the possibility of making *implicit* commitments *explicit* in the form of claims. Expressing them in this sense is bringing them into the game of giving and asking for reasons as playing the special sort of role in virtue of which something has a conceptual content at all—namely an inferential role, as premises and conclusions of inferences^{*35}.

5.3 Midterm review and a prospect for the following argument

To proceed, some comments are in order.

(1) In the present case, Sellars can be read to offer us a modal (rather than moral) version of expressivist program.

(2) Apart from that (and more important than that), Sellars's version of expressivism is an expressivism of a unique sort, distinct from that of Blackburn or Gibbard in one important respect, the key to the elucidation of which is implicitly embedded in his construal of modality as inferability.

(3) However, to make vivid the unique character of Sellarsian expressivism, we have to make a detour and revisit the idea of picturing deployed by Sellars.

(4) To rehearse my explication below, we need to register two points. i) For Sellars, picturing is no

^{*34} Sellars (1957/CDCM): p. 282.

^{*35} Brandom (1994): p. 106.

description at all, and accordingly, the word-world relation is completely ousted from the semantic realm.

ii) With the entrance of the construal of picturing as no semantic relation and the complete expulsion of word-world relation from the semantic realm, another Sellarsian thesis comes to the fore; Now, Sellars is construed to insist that even our descriptive uses of language are normativity- or inferability-laden.

5.4 DeVries' s semi-historical exposition of Sellarsian picturing

As a preliminary step to illustrate the unique character of Sellarsian expressivism, let us review what picturing is NOT for Sellars. And as a nice starting point for this, let us take up Willem deVries's excellent "semi-historical" treatise on the theme of Sellarsian picturing. In a paper titled "Naturalism, the Autonomy of Reason, and Pictures," deVries says this:

Sellars asks us to entertain the thought of a pure description of the world shorn of all explicit and all implicit prescriptive and modal elements, statement of "everything that is the case" which, however, serves *through and through, only* the purpose of stating what is the case^{*36}.

According to deVries, the notion of pure description mentioned here is dubbed (probably somewhat with his tongue in cheek) the "Joe Friday description of the world," derived from a famous line of a police detective appearing in the TV show, "Just the facts, ma'am." However as the main argument deVries poses in the article tells us, "there are some inherent difficulties with this notion, difficulties that drive Sellars to re-conceive it in terms, not of a description of the world, but of a picture of the world." Eventually, deVries reports, Sellars abandoned this idea and thus the new notion of picturing began to show up in his writings.

As the readers acquainted with Sellars's canonical texts might well suspect, the difficulty lies in the fact that the notion of pure description--representation of the world that contains no modal or prescriptive expressions--directly flies in the face of Sellars's core philosophical tenet. To show how this is so, just one or two paradigmatic citations will do^{*37}.

Now the idea that epistemic facts can be analyzed without remainder-- even 'in principle' -- into non-epistemic facts, whether phenomenological or behavioral, public or private, with no matter how lavish a sprinkling of subjunctives and hypotheticals is, I believe, a radical mistake -- a mistake of a piece with the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics^{*38}.

Among other things [the causal principle] gives expression to the fact that although describing

^{*36} deVries (2010): p. 402.

^{*37} For details, see Mitani (2014).

^{*38} Sellars (1956/ EPM): in *SPR* p. 131.

and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are distinguishable, they are also, in an important sense, inseparable. It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects, even such basic expressions as words for the perceptible characteristics of molar objects locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all^{*39}.

After all, Sellars is a philosopher of Kantian proclivity, and his entire philosophical system at the mature stage is shot through the Kantian dictum, “intuitions without concepts are blind.” To use Sellars’s cherished phrase, the heart of the matter is found in the insight that all of our epistemic/intentional/semantical vocabularies are “fraught with ought.” Thus, descriptive uses of language are always normativity- or inferability-laden in the same way as the modal and moral ones are. Differently put, the Joe Friday ideal of the world was abandoned precisely because it contained neither prescriptive nor modal vocabulary at all.

6 Global expressivism and the new bifurcation thesis

6.1 Descriptive use of language *à la* Sellarsian expressivism

That said, we can point out that there’s one important philosophical implication, which, though tacitly embedded in the explication above, deVries’s “semi-historically” conducted survey unfortunately but inevitably has to leave unexcavated.

To our present concern, what is important is to be clear about how the troublesome notion of “pure description of the world” is distinguished from picturing. And if we follow the dictum, “the diagnosis of the source of ailment points to the remedy,” the direction of cure should be easy to discern. The problem with pure description was that it contains no modality though it claims to be epistemic. Then the remedy would be a sort of segregation: Do not permit the picturing or mapping relation to enter the semantic realm, so the semantic realm shall be kept intact.

Semantic relations of meaning and reference and non-semantic relation of picturing are two separate things. What obtains between world and picturing as projection thereof is only the non-conceptual/non-intentional relationship found in the order of being (*ordo essendi*). Picturing is a mere mechanical auto-representation and contains no epistemic/intentional component. As such, picturing does not belong to the order of knowledge (*ordo cognoscendi*). As Sellars says,

“Picturing is a complex matter-of-factual relation and, as such, belongs in quite a different box from the concepts of denotation and truth^{*40}”.

^{*39} Sellars (1957/CDCM): p. 306.

^{*40} Sellars (1967/SM): p. 136.

Also, as a clue to go on, we have to take heed of the reason why the word-world relation called picturing is ousted from the semantic realm. As we saw, the reason Sellars offered was that descriptive vocabularies are always normativity- or inferability-laden.

Let me repeat one paragraph that I have just cited:

Among other things [the causal principle] gives expression to the fact that although describing and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are distinguishable, they are also, in an important sense, inseparable. It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects, even such basic expressions as words for the perceptible characteristics of molar objects locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all^{*41}.

As Brandom nicely illustrates, when the thesis above is directly applied to descriptive vocabulary, Sellars's master thought can be formulated in the following manner: being able to deploy descriptive vocabulary means having practical mastery over the inference in which that particular vocabulary is used. For example, according to Sellars's construal, a genuine observer that can deploy descriptive vocabulary is defined as an agent who can make the necessary inferential articulations about his report in the "game of giving and asking for reasons", as when he treats "red" as implying "colored," or as implied by "scarlet," or as incompatible with "This is green."^{*42}

6.2 Global expressivism, picturing, and the new bifurcation thesis

Now, this brings us to our final, crucial characterization of Sellarsian expressivism.

As is already said, one of the merits of Sellars's "going-meta-linguistic-policy" is that it enables us to pay "an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*." And as we saw, according to Sellars's inferential-cum-expressive understanding of our linguistic practice, the traditional contrast between first-class factual/descriptive discourse and second-class moral/modal discourse is altogether extinguished.

For Sellars, modal statements and descriptive statements are simply on a par as rational discourses. To be more specific, as the exposition about the descriptive vocabulary above shows, Sellars is insisting that the conceptual content of descriptive vocabularies (paradigmatically, that of observation report) is determined vis-à-vis its horizontal-inferential role, rather than the vertical, world-world semantic relation.

^{*41} Sellars (1957/CDCM): p. 306.

^{*42} cf. Brandom (2015): p. 100ff. Note that this is something the parrot mentioned earlier cannot do. He, while showing a reliable differential responsive disposition toward red-colored objects, cannot make his inferential moves. For details, see Mitani (2014).

Differently put, what Sellars had in mind when he said “prescription belongs to the same box as description” was, substantially, that descriptive use of language should be given an expressivistic treatment.

On this regard, that is, in insisting that even description is no word-world relation, Sellars’s expressivism is an expressivism of a unique sort, which is completely and globally freed from the troublesome word-world relation. To use Huw Price’s turn of phrase, it is an expressivism of a “global” sort, in contrast with Blackburn’s or Gibbard’s version of “local” expressivism, which leaves the descriptive/prescriptive division as such and retains the word-world representational relation about descriptive vocabulary^{*43}.

At the same time, we have to remember that the word-world relation is not simply deleted. It is retained as non-semantic picturing relation.

To recapitulate, the heart of the matter was this: 1) With the entrance of picturing into the scene, the word-world relation is altogether ousted from the semantic relation. 2) Contrastively, picturing is just a problem of how natural linguistic object causally relate to worldly object (rather than the facts or states of affairs that include conceptual content and thus belong to *ordo cognoscendi*). Otherwise put, with the thesis of “picturing as pure-description-minus-conceptual-content,” what belongs to a different box than the descriptive one is now picturing as non-assertional, environment tracking representation, say, shared with animals and robots, rather than non-descriptive, modal or moral statements.

Here, what is important is to be clear about the connotation of this move made by Sellars. For, with the distinction between content sensitive (i.e., conceptual-cum-semantic) representations and environment tracking causal mechanism, Sellars has moved the traditional line of demarcation between descriptive and non-descriptive language and built a new wall that had been unnoticed. That is, with the introduction of global expressivism and picturing, the demarcational line is no longer placed between descriptive and non-descriptive but between conceptual-cum-semantic and non-conceptual-cum-causal uses of language.

Again, to borrow Huw Price’s wording, Sellars has relegated “the old bifurcation thesis” to the backyard and introduced “a new bifurcation thesis” in its place. However, as John MacFarlane commented on Price’s recent book, only the initial “trail marking” job has been done with this important topic^{*44}. Sellars’s sustained philosophising about picturing and expressivist approach to semantic vocabularies at large should be granted due credit on this regard.

6.3 Re-measuring the distance between Millikan and Sellars

As a final remark of this paper, let us consider how the relationship between Sellars and Millikan is to be

^{*43} cf. Price (2013): p. 30.

^{*44} Cf. Price (2013): p. 35ff. and MacFarlane (2014). In Price (2013), Huw Price arrives at substantially the same view as Sellars’s, following his own, independent path. However, Price (2013) simply declares or rather assumes the new bifurcation thesis and does not provide any detailed argument to support it.

reconsidered from the newly gained perspective of the “new bifurcation” thesis.

True, echoing the traditional fault line that runs between the left and right wing Sellarsians, Sellars institutes a dualistic line of separation that is applied to his philosophy of language, i.e., the one between semantic and picturing use of language. However, with the new bifurcation thesis, this wall of distinction does not command a battle but urges us to accept, say, a division of labor. For, given the distinction between the normative and the non-normative realm of our linguistic activity stipulated by the new bifurcation thesis, Millikan’s theory can be construed as a much more powerful and sophisticated contribution to the “picturing” side of the wall that Sellars’s original explanation left much to be desired.

As such, Millikan’s sophisticated treatise of evolutionary biology is regarded as a supplementary material to fill in the blank that Sellars’s insightful but still inchoate theory of picturing left incomplete. That is, Millikan’s rich philosophical resource now can claim its due place within the philosophical connection of the Sellars family, without the need to feel uneasy about its digress from Sellars’s original position. Now, it’s a division of labor within the same one family rather than an unfortunate divide into the two opposing camps. The familial discord can now be amended in a philosophically fruitful way and the familial bond can be rebuilt (pace, say, deVries’s rather harsh comment on Millikan, which emphasizes the discrepancy and the unbridgeability between Millikan and Sellars^{*45}).

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^{*45} cf. deVries (2013), especially pp. 270-275. I have argued on this topic in a more detailed manner in Mitani (2015).

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